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Secretary Durand launches “UrbanRiver Visions”

WORCESTER – Bob Durand, Secretary of Environmental Affairs, today launched a seven-community initiative aimed at revitalizing core downtown areas of communities by using a natural resource, in this case rivers, as a draw for redevelopment efforts.

At the kick-off event at the Worcester Public Library, Secretary Durand outlined the UrbanRiver Visions project, and described the pilot projects in seven Bay State cities and towns. After soliciting broad based public input, these projects will ultimately yield an artist’s rendering of the local vision for redeveloping the riverfront in each of the communities and an action plan to achieve that goal. Today’s event brought together representatives of each participating community to learn about the program, view inspiring examples from around the nation, and hear about each other’s objectives for their riverfronts.

Joining Secretary Durand were Mayor Tim Murray, of Worcester, Mayor Michael Tautznik of Easthampton, Mayor Richard Kos, of Chicopee, Mayor Ed Lambert, of Fall River, Executive Assistant Paul Blazar, of Hudson, Chief of Staff to Mayor Michael Sullivan, Myles Burke, of Lawrence, and David Small, of Athol.

“People are naturally drawn to the water’s edge, whether it’s oceans, lakes, or in this case, rivers,” said Secretary Durand. “Through this program, we hope to help communities make their rivers a focal point of commerce and recreation again.”

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Durand, who originally authored both the Community Preservation Act and the Rivers Protection Act when he served in the state Senate, said the UrbanRiver Visions program represents the next step in the evolution of Community Preservation, the redirection of future growth to already developed areas where possible.

Under the program, people in each of the communities, Athol, Chicopee, Easthampton, Fall River, Hudson, Lawrence, and Worcester, will meet and come up with a unique plan based on the needs of each community. That need could be housing, historic preservation, recreation, commercial development or some combination of factors. Participating communities were chosen to achieve a mix of size and geographic location.

The consulting firm Goody, Clancy & Associates, will facilitate the charrettes and then work with each community to develop an artists rendering of the vision expressed by the community and develop an action plan to help the community to achieve its vision.

“Part of our legacy to future generations will be to give our children a world that is not filled with excessive traffic and pollution,” said Secretary Durand. “Anything we can do to redevelop existing sites and revitalize downtown areas along our historic rivers, rather than break ground on undeveloped land, will be a step in the right direction.”

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